

Request for advice

CRITICAL STUDIES ON THE PORTRAYAL OF SCIENCE IN FICTION

For a number of convergent reasons, I am interested in getting into the literature on this theme. It is already obvious how various cultural trends are reflected (even perhaps in part created) by the fictional portrayal of scientific and other heroes. In the late thirties, as I can recall myself, Sinclair Lewis ARROWSMITH resonated with a kind of folk-hero: based on the enormous humanitarian accomplishments of Pasteur and Koch. Recently, when I mentioned the book to a class I teach on "Health as human ecology", only a minority of my students had heard of it. Nor could one expect to see such a work on today's best-seller lists, except perhaps for one that focussed on the moral dilemmas of proving a risky, therapeutic innovation.

One difficulty in finding the pertinent literature is the confusion with the enormous body of writing in and about science fiction of the utopian or fantasy-oriented variety; nor indeed is there a sharp boundary.

I would be most grateful for references to comprehensive literary-critical or sociological studies of the portrayal of scientists as characters in fiction having a quasi-contemporary (as against sf) orientation. Checklists of titles and themes would also be helpful to me in recalling my own readings of representative works of this kind. Mark Schorer depicts ARROWSMITH as the precedent for the genre (excepting a minor work of H.G.Wells -- The Marriage); and I would be interested also in comments on this point.

Thank you,

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